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766 of an abnormal kind. Lepers, we remember, are buried in the bush, by the *Ndazo*; people who die of smallpox are buried in the normal manner, though their body is wrapped in dirty rags instead of a new piece of cloth, and there is no ceremonial or mourning. In most parts of Nupe death by lightning does not affect the ceremonial; but in the north and east, apparently under Gwari influence, such persons are buried by the priests of the *sogba* cult, which flourishes in Gwari country.[1] When a person dies on the farm or in one of the outlying hamlets, the body is taken to the village for burial, and all ceremonies are performed there. A person who dies on a journey or in another part of the country is buried locally, without ceremony, all the rites being performed at his or her home; but if the deceased's kinsfolk are not certain that he has been buried at all (say, in the case of people killed in the war), they will perform a fictitious burial with a shroud representing the body. Criminals who have been executed used to be buried, without rites, by the executioners; but in the case of unconvicted criminals, even if they are known to have been guilty of the most hideous crimes, the usual ceremonial is observed: as moral depravity does not count in the beyond, so it ceases to be important on the threshold.

[[84]]

764 Let me begin with a few words on the technique of burial. The grave is oblong, square, and shallow, only about two feet below the ground. There are no marks on the grave; on the contrary, the ground is carefully levelled and repaired so that it looks like any other place. If the grave is inside a sleeping hut, the latter remains in use after the burial, the same hut often containing two or three graves of successive inhabitants. The body is placed in the grave lying on its side, 'as though asleep', and, among Mohammedans, facing east. The grave chamber is kept clear of earth by a roof of wooden beams, covered with a white grass mat; the body rests on another mat of the same kind. Among Mohammedans, fresh leaves and boughs are in addition scattered over the floor
764 and roof of the grave chamber.[2] The grave-diggers are called *goro*,
767 and are charged also with preparing the body and performing a first sacrifice over the grave. Their duties, ritual already in their secrecy, are usually hereditary in certain families which hold no other religious function. Among Mohammedans the body is prepared by four male or female relatives, according to the sex of the deceased, and mallams are grave-diggers.

[1] See below, p. 211.

[2] I was told of an older form of burial, in which the grave chamber is dug into the side of a circular shaft five to six feet deep. This practice has now disappeared, though the people of Doko assured me that chiefs would still be buried in this fashion. I have seen burials of this kind only in the neighbouring country of Gwari.

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The burial is marked by extraordinary haste, the *goro* being sent for immediately. If possible, the dead are buried within three or four hours, at all times of the day, even at dawn or dusk, if only there is sufficient light to see by. There is no articulate fear or concern behind this haste, say, fear of the ghost of the dead or concern with the fate of the soul; rather is it the presence of the corpse as such which the Nupe find disturbing. The people in the house especially, who must stay with the body until the grave-diggers take over, are anxious to see it go; for 'the person who sees a dead body, his heart sinks'. For the same reason children are at once sent out of the house and not allowed to return until after the burial. When the *goro* arrive (usually three or four men) they wash the body with soap and water, rub it with aromatic camwood, wrap it into a new indigo-dyed cloth, and pull a cap (in the case of a man) or a kerchief (in the case of a woman) over the face of the deceased. Men of rank are today buried, in Moslem fashion, in a white gown, with a turban on the head. The grave is dug, the body placed in it, and the grave covered with loose earth, without ceremony. If the deceased was an old man or woman, the *goro* perform a libation of beer over the closed grave and speak a brief prayer, thus:

'Grandfather of the *kuci* (i.e. the deceased) who is returning to the earth, (thy) grandchild is now coming. (When) he arrives, spread (thy) two hands, receive him to your heart.'

All this is done in secrecy, no one watching; the mourners stay away, and when the *goro* leave the grave they will shut the door of the hut with a curtain or bar the access to the burial place with branches placed across the path. On the next day the ban will be lifted, the earth over the grave will be beaten down and levelled by the young women of the house, and if the grave had been dug in a sleeping hut (that is, for an old man), his heir will at once move in. When the grave-diggers have completed their task they join the mourners, being offered refreshment and a small fee, and leave shortly afterwards.

The news of the death travels fast, and an hour or two later the house will begin to fill with guests. Men and women stay apart, the former in the entrance hut of the house, the latter in the women's huts. All are dressed in old clothes, simply and without ostentation, and sit about stiffly, with expressionless faces. Only the chief mourners among the women—the mother, sisters, and the widows of the deceased—are expected to express their grief more violently, by loud sobbing and an occasional high-pitched wail (called *tigi*) which is the conventional expression of deep sorrow. The nature of the gathering will vary with the status of the departed; if he is a titled elder, all the other village elders will

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173 the supremacy of Idah, and established the independent Nupe kingdom which is eventually to become one of the most powerful native states in Nigeria.[2]

II.

778 The chain is the sacred relic of all *ledu* villages. It protects the village from sickness, and gives
695 fertility to the women. But it has yet another, more special, meaning. It is also called *'ti dzana*,
696 the 'head of Dzana,' and the story goes that Tsoede inaugurated the chain by beheading his own maternal uncle, Dzana, and placing head and chain together on the wooden tray as a permanent symbol for his power over life and death. From that day the chain remained an instrument of execution, and the villages which possess it are the ones to perform the execution; they are the 'king's hangmen.'[3] The jurisdiction over grave crimes lay in the hands of the king. They were actually termed *leifi nyá 'tsu*, 'crimes of the king.' But whenever such a grave crime was committed, the king had to summon the help of the *ledu*. The criminal was brought to the king's residence first. The king would then try the case, invoke the sacred ordeal, and pass the sentence. Then his own men would bring the criminal to the place of the execution, as a rule the *ledu* village situated nearest to the place of the crime. There men from the village put the criminal in irons, and led him into the bush where nobody could see him, tied the sacred chain round his neck, and strangled him. Finally they buried the corpse in the bush, and returned to their village, announcing to the king's messenger that 'everything had been done.'

681 The crimes which were regarded as such 'king's crimes' were: theft during the night, and big theft (*e.g.*, of cattle, or a horse); murder; and the crime of *lèse majesté*. In this case the *ledu* did not kill the criminal, but only flogged him severely, and drove him out of the territory of Nupe. In case the criminal was a man of high rank, perhaps of the ruling family, only the head towns, Jebba or Tada, could perform the execution.

693 Three men were the executioners in every village, and one amongst them was invariably the *ndáce*, the 'father of the shooting,' *i.e.*, the head of the hunter guild. There is a deep meaning in this. For a hunter is not only a man trained in hunting and killing, but he also possesses that essential magic which, after the act of killing, can expiate the deed, and propitiate the spirit of the dead. And through this element of propitiatory magic the killing of the guilty criminal is distinguished from all other killing. It ceases to be mere inflicting of death. It gains the dignity of a sacred office, and an almost ritual act.

693 Whether such beliefs went deeper than this; whether there existed a general superstition
● 767 which made the people shrink from the idea of inflicting death on natives of their own village, and thus made them entrust this uncanny work to people from other places, or to people protected by special magic, I dare not decide. There certainly exists still to-day a strong repugnance against
[761] having to do with all matters concerning death, and in particular unnatural death. Even the ordinary burial is carried out in secret, by one special family in every village which alone possesses the magical knowledge of burying the dead. But should a person be killed by lightning, or found murdered, no native of the village would come near the dead, but people from another village (or perhaps a village known for its special magic) would be called to perform this mysteriously perilous
693 work. Yet, on the other hand, I have positive evidence that in certain places of Nupe, outside the

[174] [2] A few words only about the possible historical basis of this tradition. According to the existing, very detailed, genealogies of the Nupe kings, Tsoede's life fell into the beginning of the sixteenth century. At that time Idah is said to have been, since long, under the supremacy of Benin. Now the big bronze figures at Jebba and Tada are cast in *cire perdue*, the same technic as the famous Benin bronzes—and a technic which does not exist, at least not in the same perfection, in Nupe country to-day. The chains and irons, finally, are evidently of European origin. They must have been brought into Nigeria by the Portuguese who, as we know, had established close contact, and an extended slave trade, with the king of Benin by the end of the fifteenth century. From Benin the bronze figures and chains might have reached Idah, and eventually Nupe, by the natural highway for trade and traffic, the Niger.—About the bronze figures see also MAN, 1931, 261, and 1934, 193.

[3] The *ledu* are also known by the name *dogari nya Tsoede*, lit. the policemen of Tsoede. *Dogari*, however, is a Hausa word, which might have been adopted more recently. In one or two places I actually found an older term still remembered: *tete-cígbeci*, lit. the executioner-medicineman. This term evidently refers to the magical element connected with this office.